

Message Text

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ACTION AF-18

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-07 H-03 INR-11 L-03

NSAE-00 NSC-07 PA-04 RSC-01 PRS-01 SP-03 SS-20

USIA-15 IO-14 DRC-01 /109 W

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R 061530Z SEP 74

FM AMEMBASSY GABORONE

TO /SECSTATE WASHDC 5770

INFO AMEMBASSY DAR ES SALAAM

AMEMBASSY LUSAKA

AMEMBASSY MASERU

AMEMBASSY MBABANE

AMEMBASSY PRETORIA

AMCONSUL CAPE TOWN

LIMITED OFFICIAL USE GABORONE 1220

E. O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PINT, BC

SUBJ: GENERAL ELECTION SET FOR OCTOBER 26.

REFS: A) GABORONE 1194(NOTAL) B) GABORONE A-89 28JUN73

1. SUMMARY; THE PRESIDENT HAS DISSOLVED PARLIAMENT AND SET ELECTIONS FOR OCTOBER 26. HE AND HIS ASSOCIATES HAVE BEEN POLITICKING FOR SEVERAL MONTHS. THE GOVERNMENT HAS BEEN CARRYING OUT REGISTRATION AND OTHER INFORMATIONAL EFFORTS TO INCREASE VOTER TURNOUT OVER A MEDIOCRE 1969 RECORD. IT IS A FOREGONE CONCLUSION THAT THE MAJORITY BOTSWANA DEMOCRATIC PARTY (BDP) WILL BE RETURNED, BUT THERE COULD BE SOME ELECTORAL SURPRISES.

2. CONFIRMING SPECULATION WHICH HAS MOUNTED DURING THE LAST FEW MONTHS, PRESIDENT SIR SERETSE KHAMA DISSOLVED PARLIAMENT ON FRIDAY, AUGUST 30, AS A PRELUDE TO GENERAL ELECTIONS (REF A). ELECTIONS HAVE BEEN SET FOR OCTOBER 26, WITH THE DEADLINE FOR LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
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NOMINATIONS FOR PARLIAMENT SEPTEMBER 27, AND FOR THE PRESIDENCY SEPTEMBER 21. BOTSWANA'S CONSTITUTION PROVIDES

THAT ELECTIONS MUST BE HELD WITHIN 60 DAYS OF THE PRESIDENT'S DISSOLUTION OF PARLIAMENT, AND NOT LESS THAN EVERY FIVE YEARS. THE LAST GENERAL ELECTION WAS HELD ON OCTOBER 18, 1969.

3. THE PRESIDENT'S ANNOUNCEMENT WAS PRECEDED BY SEVERAL MONTHS OF UNOFFICIAL ELECTIONEERING AS MINISTERS AND THE PRESIDENT AND LADY KHAMA CRISS-CROSSED THE COUNTRY, MAKING SPEECHES, OPENING SCHOOLS, CLINICS, AND WORKS PROJECTS, GENERALLY TELLING THE PEOPLE THAT THEY'VE NEVER HAD IT SO GOOD THANKS TO PRESIDENT KHAMA. ALSO CLEARLY RELATED TO THE ELECTION WAS VICE-PRESIDENT MASIRE'S ANNOUNCEMENT OF CUTS IN EXCISE TAXES.

4. THIS WILL BE BOTSWANA'S SECOND GENERAL ELECTION SINCE INDEPENDENCE. THE TURNOUT OF REGISTERED VOTERS IN 1969 WAS RATHER LOW: WITH 140,428 VOTERS REGISTERED, 76,895 VOTES WERE CAST (54.9 PERCENT). A MASSIVE EFFORT, STILL CONTINUING IN SOME AREAS, HAS BROUGHT REGISTRATION UP TO 228,000. THE GOVERNMENT INFORMATION SERVICE AND THE SUPERVISOR OF ELECTIONS ARE MOUNTING CAMPAIGNS TO EDUCATE VOTERS AS TO POLLING PLACES AND PARTY SYMBOLS. THE CAMPAIGN WILL BE HECTIC, WITH CANDIDATES ADDRESSING KGOTLA (OR VILLAGE COUNCIL) SESSIONS ALL OVER THE COUNTRY. THE GOVERNMENT HOPES BY THE REGISTRATION CAMPAIGN AND INFORMATIONAL EFFORTS TO BETTER THE PERCENTAGE FIGURES FOR VOTER TURNOUT IN THE 1969 ELECTION.

5. IN THE 1969 ELECTION, FOUR PARTIES PRESENTED CANDIDATES FOR PARLIAMENT: THE BDP, WITH 52,518 VOTES AND 24 SEATS, WAS THE ONLY PARTY TO CONTEST ALL 31 CONSTITUENCIES. THE BOTSWANA NATIONAL FRONT (BNF) GAINED 10,410 VOTES, AND THREE SEATS. IT CONTESTED 21 CONSTITUENCIES. THE BOTSWANA PEOPLES' PARTY (BPP) OBTAINED 9,329 VOTES AND THREE SEATS, CONTESTING 15 CONSTITUENCIES. THE BOTSWANA INDEPENDENCE PARTY (BIP) GOT 4,601 VOTES AND ONE SEAT, CONTESTING ONLY 9 CONSTITUENCIES.

6. IT IS A GENERALLY ACCEPTED CONCLUSION THAT THE BDP WILL BE RETURNED TO POWER WITH A SAFE, BUT SLIGHTLY DIMINISHED PARLIAMENTARY MAJORITY. THE BDP AND PRESIDENT KHAMA ARE GENUINELY POPULAR, AND IT IS TRUE THAT BOTSWANA "HAS NEVER HAD IT SO GOOD." NONETHELESS, CONSIDERABLE INTEREST WILL BE FOCUSED ON CERTAIN ASPECTS OF LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
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THE ELECTION. AS IN THE BRITISH SYSTEM THERE IS NO RESIDENCY REQUIREMENT FOR CANDIDATES. PLACING OF CANDIDATES IN "SAFE" CONSTITUENCIES IS AN IMPORTANT PART OF POLITICAL STRATEGY IN BOTSWANA. THE BDP SUFFERED AN EMBARRASSING SETBACK IN 1969 WHEN THE VICE-PRESIDENT, DR. MASIRE, WAS DEFEATED IN A KANYE CONSTITUENCY. SINCE CABINET MINISTERS MUST BE DRAWN FROM PARLIAMENT, OPPOSITION PARTIES CAN SCORE SUCCESSES BY RUNNING THEIR BEST MEN AGAINST UNPOPULAR MINISTERS. THE RULING PARTY, IN TURN, CAN TRY TO JOCKEY FOR POSITION BY PLACING ITS IMPORTANT MINISTERS IN "SAFE" CONSTITUENCIES, OR BY

COUNTERING STRONG OPPOSITION CANDIDATES WITH POPULAR, WELL-KNOWN
MINISTERS. AS CANDIDATES ARE MATCHED IN ELECTORAL DISTRICTS
THERE COULD BE SOME INTERESTING RACES AND POSSIBLY A FEW
SURPRISES.
THOMSEN

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